

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 OES-07 COME-00 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 CG-00 DOTE-00 EB-08 PA-01 ICA-11
DLOS-09 L-03 DODE-00 /072 W
-----114171 221632Z /66

R 011247Z MAR 78
FM AMCONSUL PALERMO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2399
INFO AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES
USNAF SIGONELLA
COMSIXTHFLT

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USDOCOSOUTH FOR INTAF

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EFIS, IT, IS, LY
SUBJECT: MAZARA DEL VALLO: FISHING IN UNTROUBLED WATERS?

REF: PALERMO 197 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY. MAZARA DEL VALLO, ON SICILY'S SOUTHWEST COAST CLAIMS TO BE THE LARGEST FISHING PORT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN IN TERMS OF THE NUMBER OF HOME-PORTED FISHING VESSELS AND AMOUNT OF TOTAL CATCH. CONVERSATIONS WITH LOCAL FISHING INDUSTRY LEADERS, TRAWLER CAPTAINS AND OTHERS DURING A FEBRUARY 18 VISIT PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING FACTS AND IMPRESSIONS ON MAZARA, ON ITS CHIEF INDUSTRY AND ON JURISDICTIONAL PROBLEMS WITH TUNISIA AND LIBYA. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH A POPULATION NEARING 40,000, MAZARA DEL VALLO IS THE THIRD LARGEST CITY IN TRAPANI PROVINCE. IT IS THE HOME PORT FOR MORE
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THAN 300 FISHING VESSELS WHICH FISH PRIMARILY IN THE STRAITS OF SICILY, AND ELSEWHERE OFF THE COAST OF TUNISIA AND LIBYA, BUT WHICH ALSO RANGE INTO MORE DISTANT AREAS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN. UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE CITY IS AT MARGINAL LEVELS AND INCOMES, AGAIN UNLIKE MOST OF SICILY, ARE ABOVE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. THE ANNUAL CATCH OF THE MAZARA FLEET IS ESTIMATED AT DOLS 100 MILLION THOUGH ACCURATE STATISTICS ARE DIFFICULT TO COMPLETE GIVEN LOCAL MISTRUST

OF STATISTIC (AND TAX) COLLECTORS.

2. MAZARA IS ALSO HOME TO 3000 OF TRAPANI PROVINCE'S ESTIMATED 4500 RESIDENT TUNISIANS MOST OF WHOM WORK IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY BUT WHO ALSO PROVIDE ITINERANT LABOR IN THE PROVINCE'S VINEYARDS. MOST OF MAZARA'S TUNISIANS LIVE IN AN OLD PART OF THE INNER CITY, APPROPRIATELY CALLED "THE KASBAH", WHICH ON ITS FRINGES THEY SHARE WITH ITALIAN FAMILIES. THOUGH LOCAL LEADERS SUGGEST THAT THE TUNISIANS'S INTEGRATION HAS GONE FURTHER THAN IT PROBABLY HAS, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL FRICTION AND LOCAL CHURCH AUTHORITIES HAVE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN PROVIDING SCHOOLS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES FOR THE DEPENDENTS OF TUNISIAN WORKERS. THOUGH LOCAL OFFICIALS INSISTS THAT TUNISIANS RECEIVE EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK, THERE IS DOUBTLESS SOME SHAVING OF EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASSISTANCE FUNDS AND ON WORKERS SALARIES, PARTICULARLY IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR.

3. WE FOUND LOCAL FISHING INDUSTRY LEADERS, AND TO A SOMEWHAT LESSER DEGREE THE FISHERMEN THEMSELVES, QUITE RESTRAINED IN THEIR REACTION TO THE SOME 15-20 SEIZURES PER YEAR OF MAZARA FISHING VESSELS. WHILE FISHING INDUSTRY SPOKESMEN CLAIMED THAT MAZARA VESSELS DID NOT VIOLATE ZONES PROHIBITED UNER THE ITALO-TUNISIA FISHERIES AGREEMENT, MAZARA'S PORT CAPTAIN VOLUNTEERED THAT VIOLATIONS DO INDEED OCCUR - SOMETIMES UNWITTINGLY, BUT OFTEN ENOUGH WITH DECIDEDLY LESS INNOCENCE. WE WERE TOLD, FOR EXAMPLE THAT TUNISIA'S HIGH-SEAS CAPTURE OF A MAZARA TRAWLER EARLIER THIS MONTH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS IN REPRISAL FOR A MAZARA VESSEL PREVIOUSLY FOUND IN TUNISIAN WATERS BUT WHICH HAD NOT BEEN SEIZED BECAUSE IT HAD LOST A MAN OVERBOARD. ON LATTER OCCASION, TUNISIANS HAD EVEN HELPED SEARCH FOR LOST CREW MEMBER. SOMEWHAT SUPRISINGLY, REFERENCES TO SUCH KINDS OF COOPERATION WERE FAR MORE FREQUENT THAN THOSE TO SOURCES OF FRICTION

4. TRAWLER CAPTAIN WITH WHOM WE TALKED SUGGESTED THAT THE TUNISIAN REGULAR NAVY RARELY MADE MISTAKES IN IDENTIFYING VESSELS WHICH HAD VIOLATED PROTECTED OR TERRITORIAL WATERS, THOUGH UNITS OF OTHER TUNISIAN ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WERE MORE PRONE TO ERROR BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE TRAINING, NAVIGATIONAL EQUIPMENT, ETC. THE ITALIAN NAVY MAINTAINS ONE PATROL VESSEL ON PERMANENT STATION IN AREAS FISHED BY THE MAZARA FLEET, AND HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN INTERVENING WHERE TUNISIAN VESSELS HAVE CLEARLY GONE BEYOND TERRITORIAL WATERS TO MAKE ARRESTS. HELPFUL HERE, WE ARE TOLD, IS FACT THAT MANY TUNISIAN NAVAL OFFICERS ARE GRADUATES OF ITALIAN SERVICE ACADEMIES WHICH FACILITATES DISCUSSION AND PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.

5. WHILE ONE FISHING CAPTAIN TO WHOM WE SPOKE URGED A LARGER, MORE ENERGETIC ITALIAN NAVY PRESENCE, OTHERS BELIEVED CURRENT RESTRAINT WAS PREFERABLE TO AN ESCALATION WHICH WOULD DAMAGE BOTH THE CATCH

AND ITALO-TUNISIAN RELATIONS AT A SENSITIVE TIME FOR BOTH COUNTRIES. A LOCAL FISHING INDUSTRY OFFICIAL TOLD US TOO THAT HE HAD ATTENDED A MEETING IN ROME AT WHICH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NAVY ADMITTED TO HIM THAT ORDERS FOR RESTRAINT HAD BEEN ISSUED BY THE ITALIAN DEFENSE AND FOREIGN MINISTRIES. IN ALL EVENTS, THE CURRENT NUMBER OF SEIZURES SEEMED WELL WITHIN LIMITS TOLERABLE TO THE MAZARESI AND FINES COLLECTED BY THE TUNISIANS WERE READILY PASSED ON TO CONSUMERS IN MAZARA'S MARKET AREAS (ITALY AND SPAIN PRIMARILY).

6. THE MAZARA FLEET'S PROBLEMS WITH LIBYA ARE OF A DIFFERENT ORDER. CONCERNED LESS ABOUT FISH, THE LIBYANS SEIZE MAZARA VESSELS PRIMARILY FOR FEAR THEY ARE ENGAGED IN ARMS SMUGGLING OR OTHER ACTIVITIES DETRIMENTAL TO LIBYAN SECURITY. THERE SEEMED TO BE LITTLE LOCAL HOSTILITY TO LIBYA, HOWEVER, AND A LOCAL INDUSTRY OFFICIAL HOPED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT THE LONG-PROPOSED JOINT GOL-MAZARA FISHING COOPERATIVE COULD BE ESTABLISHED SOON AFTER THE FORMATION OF A NEW SICILIAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT. COLLINS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, PORT FACILITIES, PORTS, FISHING BOATS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PALERM00207
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780172-0782
Format: TEL
From: PALERMO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803117/aaaadvlc.tel
Line Count: 139
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 18f03dba-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 PALERMO 197
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3147451
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MAZARA DEL VALLO: FISHING IN UNTROUBLED WATERS?
TAGS: EFIS, IT, IS, LY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/18f03dba-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014